

ASPIRE & ACHIEVE TOGETHER



HOLCOMBE
GRAMMAR SCHOOL



Welcome from the Headteacher

Dear parents, carers and students

Welcome to Holcombe Grammar School. At Holcombe, our aim is to develop students into successful, well-rounded, confident young people who are equipped with the academic and life skills necessary to thrive in the modern world and become the best possible versions of themselves.

Students at Holcombe are given the academic and intellectual tools to help them structure their thinking and learning effectively, thus enabling them to engage successfully in their studies. We believe in developing our students' understanding of how their brain works and how to deliberately use their brain in the most effective way for both academic and personal success.

Every individual is encouraged to 'Be Your Best Self' and there is an emphasis on celebrating student progress as well as attainment. Whilst many students go on to achieve places at Oxford, Cambridge and other prestigious Russell Group Universities, we celebrate the achievements of all students and encourage every individual to aspire and achieve their personal best.

We offer a very successful and diverse range of sports using our excellent facilities, including a 3G pitch, sports hall and state of the art gym. All of this is delivered in a caring, supportive environment which ensures that every student feels a sense of community and belonging.

In March 2024, Ofsted confirmed the findings of their previous inspection (2018) and stated that "This school continues to be good".

They found that:

- The school's motto of 'Transforming Life Chances' is reflected in all that the school does.
- Teachers are real experts. They have strong subject knowledge and a passionate interest in the subjects that they teach.
- Pupils are proud to attend their Rights Respecting school and attendance is very high.

Holcombe is part of The Thinking Schools Academy Trust, a growing family of schools across the South of England, including Rochester Grammar School, The Victory Academy, New Horizons Children's Academy and other schools in Strood, Deal, Portsmouth and the South-West. We are a successful and rapidly growing Trust, with high expectations for our students. We set ambitious targets for learning and progress and work together to 'Transform Life Chances' for all our young people.

I am delighted to introduce you to our prospectus and hope it gives you a real feel for life at Holcombe Grammar School.

Lee Preston
Headteacher





Our Community

The sense of community at Holcombe is palpable and is woven into the very fabric of the building.

To develop this sense of community, every student is offered the opportunity to participate in a range of activities in the local community. They are offered a variety of school trips that form the basis of their shared experiences and sense of belonging, forming memories and connections that live beyond their time at school. Students have many opportunities to broaden their horizons and build their cultural capital, such as international partnerships, trips and visits, including residential. In addition, our annual Founders' Day is an event that brings staff, students and parents together to celebrate the whole school community and the year gone by.

At Holcombe, we purposefully create a core of activities and experiences that all students in a year group will share, to help them bond as a group and develop lifelong friendships and memories.

Throughout the academic year, our school participates in various Trust-wide events, known as #WeAreOne events. These cover key celebrations such as Black History Month, World Book Day, Mental Health Awareness Week and more. We also make an effort to support national and local charities where we can, running fundraising activities as part of our #WeAreOne events or as a separate occasion, like our annual charity appeal at Christmas.



'The school community takes opportunities to celebrate its diversity often.'

Ofsted 2024



Habits and Rewards

At Holcombe we believe it is essential that students receive regular rewards and recognition to encourage their progress and develop their confidence.

One of the core values at Holcombe is 'Respect'. Students and staff work together to build an environment that encourages respect for self, respect for others, respect for the environment and respect for learning.

Students have opportunities to work interdependently outside of lessons to develop the Holcombe Habits that enable them to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Students are able to share their opinions in an environment where they will be listened to, challenged and encouraged to respect differing views, in a constructive manner.

By rewarding students for doing the right thing, we reinforce good habits, thereby developing the routines and skills that will make them successful throughout their life. To reinforce these desired habits and skills, we use a comprehensive reward system for students. Every student has a Reward Card and we also have our online Classcharts system. Teachers are encouraged to give students House points on either the student's Reward Card or on Classcharts whenever they see the student exhibiting the behaviours we are trying to reinforce. As students accumulate House Points, they gain rewards. This information is shared with parents via Classcharts so parents are kept regularly informed of their child's progress.

Students also gain prizes every term in recognition of outstanding performance and progress or effort in academic subjects. In this way, student success and demonstration of appropriate work habits are positively reinforced, so that the successful behaviour becomes part of a student's normal routine.

Holcombe Grammar is a Rights Respecting Committed School and proudly received our Gold Rights Respecting School Award in Summer 2024. Our commitment to the articles of the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) means that we ensure students learn in an inclusive community where everyone is respected. It also means we work together so that every child thrives in a community where they can develop their full potential; where their views are respected and they know that everything we do is in the best interest of the student.

'Pupils positive attitudes to learning and staffs consistent use of the behaviour policy ensure a purposeful atmosphere in lessons.'

Ofsted 2024





Mastery, Endeavour and Thinking

Mastery, Endeavour and Thinking: The stepping stones to a successful future.

Holcombe Grammar School firmly believes in giving students opportunities to build a successful future for themselves. As our school vision says, Holcombe is an ambitious and supportive Grammar school where life chances are transformed through Mastery, Endeavour and Thinking.

Teachers and students strive to become Masters of their chosen fields. This attitude of constant inquisitiveness leads to new ideas being explored, trialled and evaluated, as students push themselves to greater heights.

Mastery of a chosen field does not come without Endeavour. Holcombe's history has strong links with Chatham Dockyard and the sense of industry and hard

work has not left the school. At Holcombe, students realise that they will reap the rewards of the effort that they put in both inside and outside of the classroom.

'Thinking' tools provide a structure that enables Holcombe students to understand how they learn. A clear understanding of Metacognition enables members of the Holcombe community to develop skills that serve them long after their time at the School.

'Pupils are provided with a wealth of opportunities to nurture existing talents and interests as well as discover new ones.'

Ofsted 2024



Mastery

At Holcombe we aspire for all our students to achieve their personal best and to 'Be Your Best Self'.

Many of our students achieve the very best academic grades and entry to some of the world's top universities, developing Mastery in their field.

Our students have an excellent track record of achieving university offers from some of the country's most prestigious universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick, Leeds, Bath and other Russell Group Universities.

Holcombe also have increasing numbers seeking higher level apprenticeships from institutions such as Deloitte Bank and JP Morgan.

Every student is supported and challenged to recognise and make the best of their natural academic talents and leave Holcombe on a pathway to personal success.

'Students in 6th form value the guidance they are given for their next steps. They feel well informed about university courses, apprenticeships and employment.'

Ofsted 2024





Endeavour

Holcombe Grammar School provides a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum that caters for the needs of all our students. We accomplish this within a community where everyone is treated as an individual that matters.

Our curriculum nurtures independent learning through varied and exciting lessons that stimulate and motivate students and by developing thinking, understanding and creativity. The school encourages high levels of aspiration and cooperation, so every student gains as much from their education and preparation for life as possible.

Students all follow the core subjects from Years 7 – 11. From the start of Year 7, students are able to access an appropriate level of challenge and support to match their level of ability. Homework is set regularly and allows students to deepen and extend their learning beyond the classroom. We recognise that not all students find homework easy to cope with, so facilities are available for quiet study and support after school and many students take up the opportunity to work independently in these environments.

In Years 10 – 13, a wide range of GCSE and A Level subjects are available. At GCSE Level, all students follow the core curriculum of English, Mathematics, Science, a language and either History or Geography, but also have the chance to choose optional subjects based upon their preferences, interests, and career and higher educational aspirations.

'The school is ambitious for all pupils and knows the importance of ensuring that they are given a high quality curriculum.'

Ofsted 2024





Thinking

In order to support our students in achieving their aspirations, we believe in developing their ability to think and learn effectively.

As part of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust, Holcombe Grammar School has adopted the 'Thinking School' approach to teaching and learning.

We equip our students with a variety of skills and resources which encourage them to become articulate, creative and adaptable thinkers: we like to call this the 'Thinkers' Toolkit'. Students are taught a variety of thinking approaches and techniques that they can use to support them in whatever activity they are engaged in. These tools include: Thinking Maps, De Bono's Thinking Hats and Art Costa's Habits of Mind, which we have adapted into the Holcombe Habits.

We are also developing the use of memory tools across our curriculum, including spaced learning and testing, mnemonics, acrostics and memory bumps such as rhythm and rhyme. This common approach to teaching and learning across a student's lessons means that the school is developing a common language of learning between subjects, teachers and students.

In this way, students always have a thinking or memory tool to use to help them complete whatever task they are challenged with, thereby making them much more able to succeed in completing any intellectual challenge they face either at school or later in life.

We also teach our students the skill of Reflection. By developing personal reflection skills, students are able to effectively reflect on their learning and work with teachers to ensure they all make excellent progress.

In 2023, Holcombe Grammar School was accredited as an Advanced Thinking School by the University of Exeter's School of Education, which leads the way on Metacognition, Thinking Skills and Creativity and

provides a framework for schools to follow to become recognised Thinking Schools. In a glowing report on our school, the University commented that:

"The school prides itself on providing a caring, supportive environment and this is underpinned by the house and pastoral systems, which ensure that every student has a sense of community and belonging."

"The Regional Governing Body and the Academic Advisory Board are fully supportive of the 'Thinking School' ideal and recognise the part it plays in the development and achievements of students as skilled, independent and reflective learners, who embrace challenge and aspire to and strive for personal excellence."

Schools across the Trust work together to *"improve the life chances of all their children and young people, underpinned by a common mission to nurture successful children who are confident learners and can think and act independently."*



The Extended Curriculum

There are a number of additional activities available to students which extend beyond our academic curriculum.

Holcombe offers a huge amount of support outside normal school hours, where students can access the expertise of our well qualified, dedicated and experienced staff. Support is available outside normal lesson time in order to help our students to achieve their full potential in their GCSE and A Level examinations. Whatever a student's talents or abilities, our school strives to grow the whole person.

In order to achieve this, we believe in giving young people responsibilities and opportunities to pursue their passions throughout their time in the school. The outcome of this is the large number of societies and activities the school runs, which are often self-starting, student-led and grown to meet the needs of the school community at any given time.

These opportunities are rich and diverse: for example, Sixth Form mentors work with and support younger students; the student library team runs the dedicated fiction library, and the School's Captains' Team and Prefects organise events throughout the year. In this way, students develop their passions and achieve their personal ambitions, developing the key "soft skills" of leadership, teamwork and independent action that are critical to long-term success.

Extra-Curricular activities are very important to us and we offer a wide range of sports including football, hockey, rugby, athletics and cricket at levels accessible to, and appropriate for, anyone who wishes to participate. The school encourages students with aspirations to play football at a high level to receive coaching and support from older, more experienced students, who already play good quality football and who have been supported by the school to work towards coaching qualifications.

The House system allows for internal competition, whilst school teams and individuals compete very successfully against local schools, in county competitions and at national and international level.

Our Music department also offers opportunities for students to participate for fun or to gain qualifications and to perform at a high level, and we have a successful and evolving Drama department which allows students to explore and express their creative talents.

'Pupils are provided with a wealth of opportunities to nurture existing talents and interests as well as discover new ones. High numbers participate in the DofE scheme or join sea cadets.'

Ofsted 2024

Artsmark

As part of Holcombe Grammar School's mission to 'Transform Life Chances', we believe we have a responsibility to build our young people's cultural capital as much as possible. This means offering opportunities for our students to explore culture in its various forms, immerse themselves in the Arts and learn about the world beyond their personal location and circumstances.

We believe that by expanding our students' cultural knowledge and encouraging them to engage in new experiences, we can support their personal growth and extend their knowledge beyond the taught curriculum.

Every student at Holcombe has a Cultural Passport which encourages them to record and reflect on their cultural experiences. The Passport offers a range of activities and ideas for broadening students' horizons and developing their skills, from managing a budget and learning a survival skill to visiting an art gallery and trying foods from different countries. Our school offers as many opportunities as possible to equip our young people with a diverse set of experiences, skills and knowledge.

In order to offer a full and enriching experience which builds cultural capital, Holcombe has committed to our Artsmark journey, ensuring the cultural and creative education we provide is broad, diverse and engaging. We are proud to have been awarded our Silver Artsmark Award in 2024 and are actively working towards Gold.

'Students have opportunities to perform to large audiences through whole school productions, music concerts and through specific projects. Careers in the arts and creative industries are actively promoted, such as taking students on a tour of the Sky Studios to learn about work and apprenticeship opportunities.'

Artsmark Report 2024





Success in the Sixth Form

The Sixth Form at Holcombe Grammar School successfully supports students in their final transition into the 'real world'.

From day one, our students are encouraged to consider their goals for when they leave Year 13 and outline what they need to do during their time in Sixth Form to achieve their aspirations. This means that, from the very outset, our Sixth Form students understand that this is the final preparation for the next step in their life journey and are consciously thinking about what they are trying to achieve at the end of their time in the Sixth Form.

Students have access to two Sixth Form study centres within the school; the Hub and the Hive. These are built around the same model as a university library, with a cafe available for students as well as quiet work areas and computer facilities; thus, students experience and develop the work habits necessary to be successful when they move on to university or the world of work.

At this point, students accelerate the responsibilities they take in the school: the School Captains' Team takes responsibility for the organisation of such events as Founders' Day; House Prefects take on the running of their Houses; and Academic Prefects run the school support programme for fellow students who find a subject challenging.

'Students in the 6th form appreciate the excellent learning environment that the school offers, they enjoy the quality and depth of discussions and debates that they experience in their lessons.'

'Some students in 6th form develop their leadership skills by running the school council, mentoring younger pupils or delivering speeches on open days.'

Ofsted 2024



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THINKING
SCHOOLS
ACADEMY TRUST